

9. Re-Crossing a Different Water: Colonialism, Indigenism and Indo-Fijian Migration¹

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"My memory is again in the way of your history."
Agha Shahid Ali, "Farewell", *The Country without a Post Office*.

Introduction

Since the middle of the twentieth century indigenism has been a powerful legitimating narrative, especially for former colonies. In Fiji, however, the internal tensions of the term have enmeshed themselves with the plurality of ways in which Fijian society must reconstitute itself after decolonization and the coups of 1987 and 2000. The ethnic issues in Fiji have led to the employment of a number of strategies by both the indigenous and the Indian communities. Some consist of networking within transnational spaces and negotiation with external political and cultural flows, especially around the Pacific Rim, while others are more inward in their everyday strategies, offering a non-reductive way to think about identity, decolonization, cultural transformation and notions of autonomy and solidarity. This chapter raises questions about notions of citizenship and duties of

social protection by the state. It also draws attention to the domestic levels effects of global and regional flows of people and ideas.

In a workshop on subaltern and indigenous histories, Dipesh Chakrabarty asked: "Can postcolonial histories and indigenous histories engage in a dialogue?"² This question is particularly relevant for cultural studies in the Pacific because it encapsulates the nature of the intellectual and political problems that scholars of that area face. In Fiji, the task of provincializing Europe means interrogating the models imported from it—democracy, a belief in progress and modernity, ideas of state and nation, developmentalist transformation.

This question has a particularly empowering effect because it puts the process of making history in the picture. Chakrabarty, in another context, has pointed out that non-western histories are themselves subaltern because they exist in the shadow of Europe. This is not solely because of colonization's powerful intrusion into other continents but because Europe's self-perceived movement toward state-building capitalist development and modernity marked and still marks a vision of historical progress against which African, Asian, Pacific or Latin American history appears as failure of the nation to come into its own.³

Also, since cultural forms will always be made, unmade, and remade, communities can and must reconfigure themselves, drawing selectively on remembered pasts. The relevant question is whether, and how, they convince and coerce insiders and outsiders, often in power-charged, unequal situations; for example, the issues of indigenous versus migrant rights to land and franchise in Fiji. Thus, what is lost and rediscovered in new situations becomes part of the realm of normal political or cultural activity. For example, Kaplan and Kelly claim in their recent book that "community" is not a "universally adopted modern imaginary" but has a "sinister political life" which in Fiji "clearly emerged as a new name for race".⁴ And as Peter Van der Veer points out, the contingent and contex-

1. This chapter is due to be published as a chapter called 'Colonialism and Third Worldism in Fiji' in 2004.

2. D. Chakrabarty speaking at a workshop on Subaltern, Multicultural and Indigenous Histories, UTS, 20-21 July 2000.

3. Chakrabarty 1992.

4. Kaplan and Kelly 2001, 199.

tual nature of community derive from displacement, disjuncture and diaspora and the contradictions between the notion of discrete territoriality in the discourse of nationalism and the transgressive fact of migration.⁵ Thus the concept of "homeland" becomes a site constantly disrupted and negotiated by migration and translocation. The case of Fiji is an instance of a failure of regional integration and concepts of Third World solidarity that has its roots in the shared colonial experiences of both indigenous and Indo-Fijians.

Shared and Contested Histories

The specific case of Fiji dramatizes some fascinating conflicts of paradigms in the conceptualization of land, identity and nation. As Canadian political philosopher Joseph Carens remarked in a 1992 article, "Democracy and Respect for Difference: the Case of Fiji", published in the *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform*, "What makes the case of Fiji particularly rich and rewarding for purposes of reflection is its moral complexities and ambiguities. There are two groups in conflict here and both arouse our moral sympathies".⁶ In this article, Carens defends policies designed to maintain indigenous land ownership or to preserve chiefly authority in Fijian society and politics as essential to help preserve traditional Fijian culture, even though those arrangements impose some costs on the Indo-Fijian population. Carens claims that these illiberal practices have been good for native Fijians. "It seems plausible to suppose that policies more in keeping with liberal individualism—for example an insistence on individual, alienable title to land as opposed to the collective, inalienable form of ownership adopted in Fiji—might have had disastrous consequences for native Fijians as such policies did elsewhere".⁷ Although the practices involve restrictions of individual rights, native Fijians have, on the whole, genuinely benefited from them.

5. Van der Veer 1995.

6. Carens 1992.

7. Ibid., 576.

Carens also has a connected negative argument. He claims that these arrangements to preserve traditional Fijian culture do not involve serious violations of moral requirements and are not "dependent on the subordination of any other group".⁸ Thus, for example, although native Fijians have secured their continued ownership of the vast majority of land, "Fijian dominance in this area is balanced by the dominance Indians have achieved in other areas of economic life".⁹ Carens is therefore suggesting that policies designed to preserve cultural differences may be legitimate as long as they do not violate what he calls "minimal moral standards".¹⁰ He is therefore critical of the 1987 military coups because their "goal was... the firm establishment of native Fijian political hegemony".¹¹ By contrast, Fiji's political system before the coup, including the arrangements designed to protect traditional Fijian culture, was not "dependent on the subordination of any other group" and so did not, Carens argues, deny Indians equal citizenship.

At the end of the chapter, I will return to this idea of "moral ambiguity", the counterposing of two different sets of "rights" crucial to the debate around land and citizenship in the Pacific. However, the current political and social paradoxes in Fiji are directly related to nineteenth century British colonialism. The paternalistic interventions of the British governor-general Arthur Gordon aimed to protect the rights and way of life of indigenous Fijians after cession. At the same time the economic imperatives of colonialism necessitated the import of indentured Indians to Fiji to extract profit from the sugar plantations.

Peter France has pointed out that the efforts to establish and codify customary land tenure in Fiji began very early in the colonial period.¹² Rights of the indigenous inhabitants were initially guaranteed against the claims of European settlers and later Indian immigrants. Land assumed a different place in the ethnic relations and the political field of colonial and independent Fiji. Henry Rutz, in his article "Capitalizing on Custom" terms this the "moral irony" in Fijian history.

8. Ibid., 594.

9. Ibid., 595.

10. Ibid., 628.

11. Ibid., 574.

12. France 1969, passim.

The founding of an orthodoxy pertaining to Fijian traditions in general, and to land rights in particular, had as its underlying motivation the preservation of a Fijian way of life. In the event, a way of life was constructed on the foundations of village life and buttressed by bureaucratic administrative regulations and procedures. Europeans contributed to an ideology of traditionalism and to a "Fijian world view" in which the form of the moral economy was opposed against an emergent capitalist society... [Later] the founding of a capitalist land corporation inside the structure of invented tradition is perhaps the greatest irony of Fijian history. The case is only slightly overstated by saying that, whereas Fijian tradition was in large part invented by Europeans as a bulwark against the most harmful aspects of their capitalist system, Fijian modernism is being constructed by Fijian capitalists in a modern chiefly state.¹³

Peter France documents how this new orthodoxy of inalienability meant that Fijian land practices were now inflexibly codified in ways that proscribed such Fijian customs as diverse forms of land-gift and tribute. Social units such as lineage, clan and tribe as well as custom were constructed as immemorial and unchanging, "tradition was removed from and placed above the historical events that led to its creation".¹⁴ However, since agricultural production and trade had to be facilitated, the Native Land Trust Board was created in the 1940s to lease this inalienable land to Indian sugar-cane farmers and was seen by indigenous Fijians as protective of their interests. In fact, as Rutz argues above, it caused further contradictions in the structure of land control by closing off the capaciousness and flexibility of previous land practices. It turned chiefs into effective landowners, an inversion of Fijian culture, which places ownership in the hands of commoners. In fact, the protracted negotiations between the NLTB and the *mataqali* served to mask the potential conflict inherent in this system.

These complexities and conflicts are intensified because of the lived experiences of Fijians in both the past and the present. Margaret Jolly,

13. Rutz 1987, 557.

14. Ibid., 538.

amongst others, believes that for indigenous Fijians the past exists in the present; the past and the present are seen as continuous and enmeshed, rather than discrete entities. Therefore, the way of money (associated sometimes with Europeans but mainly with Indians),¹⁵ which is seen as existing solely in and for the present, is contrasted with the way of the land (the Fijian way) which existed immutably in the constructed past of indigenous Fijians as well as in the lived present. Ironically, both communities now appear to desire a "true" present—indigenous Fijians by "forgetting" the history of land codification and indenture and Indo-Fijians by re-emphasizing it.

Martha Kaplan also demonstrates how this contrast between the communal traditionalism of the Fijians and the individual commercialism of the Indo-Fijians derives from British codifications of their respective racial identities. Colonial relations with Fijians were posited as relations with communities, mediated through chiefs and land codifications, and kinship collectivities attached indissolubly to the land. Individual entrepreneurial spirit, pursuing the "path of money" was constituted as a rejection of communal living.¹⁶ Thus Fijians were discouraged from engaging in business or cash farming. In contrast and in opposition to colonial policies in India itself, the British treated Indo-Fijians as isolated individuals. As indentured labor, they were conceived of as "labor units" defined by individual agreements with their employers. Later, they were perceived as disorderly and threatening, amplified by the fact that Indians were reluctant to support the war effort during the Second World War, demanded equal pay with British soldiers and organized strikes in this period.¹⁷ While British colonial policy emphasized the civilizing mission towards indigenous Fijians, the racial identity of immigrant Indians was established as a threat to Fijian dominance. Indo-Fijian leaders such as A. D. Patel, from 1946 onwards, appropriated this colonial identity by claiming a place in the nation on the basis of their labor and economic contribution.¹⁸

15. Jolly 1992.

16. Kaplan 1988, 101-6.

17. Ibid., 106. See also Lal 1992, 1998.

18. Jolly 1992, 346.

One of the major consequences of British colonial policies is the fact that at the current time, Fiji has 82.38 percent of its land under native title, 9.45 percent state land and 8.17 percent freehold.¹⁹ Most Indians and Europeans farm or conduct business on leasehold of native title land. Under the 1966 Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Ordinance, many Indo-Fijian farmers secured 30-year leases, at relatively low rents for sugar cane cultivation. These leases started expiring in 1997, and a Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) survey suggested that many landowners either wanted to reclaim their lands or alter leasing terms and rentals.

In *Fiji in Transition*, J. N. Kamikamica writes:

The land question is one of the most divisive and potent political issues in Fiji. It underlies and permeates the economic, social and political fabric of Fiji society ... The Fijian indigenous community regard their land as a symbol of identification of their place and traditional role in society. To them, the land is basically a heritage to be protected and safeguarded. It maintains their links with the past and offers security to them, now and in the future.²⁰

The major grievance held by indigenous Fijians against the Mahendra Chaudhry government elected in 1999 was around the issue of land. An Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act (ALTA) task force looking into the future of the substantial numbers of land leases which were up for renewal recommended against continuing with ALTA, claiming that Fijian landowners had been denied active participation in the sugar industry and use of their land. It accused the Native Land Trust Board and the government of failing to protect landowner interests and promote opportunities for Fijians. It recommended that no compensation be paid to tenants whose leases are not renewed for "unauthorized improvements" to land (despite farmers' claims that landowners were aware of and did not object to improvements). Through consultation with the Council of Chiefs, the Chaudhry government developed proposals for a Land Use Commission and reform of the powerful Native Lands Trust Board. It also proposed

19. Ward 1997, 248.

20. Kamikamica 1997, 259.

a one-off payment of F\$28,000 for farmers whose leases were not to be renewed. This engendered suspicions that Chaudhry had used land reform to divide chiefs from commoners and throw money at his Indian constituency.

After the 2000 coup, some Fijians tried to highlight the numerous pro-indigenous policies then current. Josetaki Waqanisau pointed out that the native land controlled by indigenous Fijians include more than eighty hotel or tourism leases administered by the Native Land Trust Board which is responsible for leasing Fijian-owned land on behalf of the owners. These include Sheraton, Warwick, Naviti, Treasure Island, Castaway and Mana Island Resorts among others. Native landowners currently receive substantial annual incomes from tourism leases.²¹

Indigenous Fijians also have scholarships available through the Fijians Affairs Board, programs encouraging Fijians in business such as incentives for share holdings with foreign and Fijian-owned businesses, and easy access to credit from the Fiji Development Bank. Academics from the University of the South Pacific also pointed out that wealthy Indo-Fijians were a relatively small percentage of the Indian population and poverty in the Indo-Fijian community was comparable to that in the indigenous Fijian community.

However, a clear perception continues amongst indigenous Fijians that indigenous land rights, well-being and cultures are under threat. The resurgence of debates on indigenous rights in various colonies has strengthened the tropes of indigenous Fijian dispossession and oppression. During the coups of 1987, the indigenous communities in Australia, for example, were divided on whether the coups should be supported because they upheld indigenous rights or reviled for instituting a form of apartheid.

Following the coup of May 2000, a letter about Fiji's constitutional dilemma was circulated by a group of indigenous Fijians. This letter attempted to reconcile the problematic of a democratic civil society in Fiji

21. J. Waqanisau, 'Fijians' Paramouncy- Let's think rationally', undated letter circulated by email by academics at the University of the South Pacific after the coup in May 2000. I have a hard copy in my possession. This name appears to be a pseudonym and the identity of the writer is unknown to the USP academics who circulated the letter. However, the figures appear to be credible.

with indigenous paramountcy and labeled the prospect of a non-Fijian as Prime Minister "dangerous" since "the Indian community remains so out of touch with Fijian interests, needs, aspirations and constraints". It continued:

However, it is very problematic, nonetheless, to specify in any decree or constitution that only Fijians are eligible for certain positions or offices. To the international community this is like a red rag to a bull; such a provision may also be used by the more aggressive and less understanding of our neighbors to justify sanctions or to pressure more tolerant nations into statements or actions of condemnation. It is also unnecessary. The same outcome – the reservation of certain key political positions for Fijians – can be achieved in an internationally acceptable form by requiring that the holders of the office meet the criteria of fluency in the language, customs, practices, traditions etc. of the country. The criteria of cultural competency can be set to ensure that that it is virtually impossible for a non-Fijian to pass the required tests. Moreover, if there is any question relating to an individual's cultural competency, the Great Council of Chiefs will be the final arbiter. Moreover, the Council can readily be restricted to Fijians in that it is an exclusively indigenous organization in which chiefs, and chiefs alone, are authorized to sit. Non-Fijians may be invited to address the Council, but no one other than chiefly Fijians would have a right of membership.²²

Robbie Robertson reported that after the coups of May 1987, many indigenous Fijians termed "democracy" "demon-crazy".²³ Democracy was represented in ways that resembled the "Asian Values" rhetoric of South East Asian politicians by Laisenia Qarase, the Prime Minister of the interim government of Fiji installed by the military in September of 2000 when he addressed the United Nations:

It would seem that a new form of imperialism has emerged. As if the corrosive influence and impact of their mass culture of consumerism and materialism

22. Letter from a group of unnamed indigenous Fijians circulated on a Fiji email list in June 2000. A hard copy is in my possession.

23. Robertson 2000, 278.

are not enough, this new form of domination is being propagated by the "purists" of the liberal democracies, in the name of good governance, human rights, accountability and transparency. But what is of concern is that we are being told to apply these standards and values of liberal democracy strictly according to their standards, without regard for the particular or complex circumstances in each country.²⁴

Qarase expressed concern that some of the fundamental principles on which the United Nations was formed, "respect for national sovereignty and of non-interference in the internal affairs" of a member state, "are being eroded and violated." While the world is "a closely-linked global community, it does not give a country the right to impose on another its own standards of democratic governance and what it perceives or considers to be right and acceptable," he concluded.²⁵

Shared and Contested Memories

My reflections here are based on interviews conducted with Indo-Fijian women in the liminal space between two major events in their history, the coups of May 1987 and May 2000. For these women, the "naming" of places as home determined the links between the idea of home with an entire range of personal, national, social and cultural issues.

The coups highlighted another complicating factor: that of imagining a nation in Fiji. Kaplan and Kelly have criticized Benedict Anderson's argument about imagined communities by privileging a Bakhtinian dialogic anthropology that represents global history as "a series of planned and lived responses to specific circumstances that were also irreducibly constituted by human subjects, creating... a dense complex network of individual and collective subjects continually responsive to one another."²⁶ However, since national belonging is not singular, exclusionary or a func-

24. United Press International (UPI) 2000.

25. United Press International (UPI) 2000.

26. Kaplan and Kelly 2001, 6.

tion of direct or unmediated experience, my purpose in this part of the discussion is to elaborate how memory informs everyday life and disrupts the concept of "Indian-ness" through ordinary narratives of dislocation and renewal.

For my interlocutors, recollections of the past serve as the "active ideological terrain on which people represent themselves to themselves"²⁷ and to each other. For Indo-Fijian migrants, the past is invested with an intense significance precisely because the present has been made unstable or unpredictable as a consequence of the coups. The present acquires its meaning with reference to "a disjointed and conflicted story of the past in which references to official narratives about colonization and a historical memory are tangled up with personal memories and private recollections of past experiences."²⁸ The past is a vital element in the construction of Indo-Fijian identity but "it comprises a 'renovated' and selectively appropriated set of memories and discourses".²⁹ For this community, recollections take on a special import because they represent discourses which are stable and can be presented as authentic. Present disruptions, predicaments and uncertainties are more bearable if the past remains unambiguous.

In this context, after 1987 and before the May 2000 coup, Indo-Fijians appeared to foreground their Indianness; they were interested in ways of being Indian and debates on authenticity, legitimacy, multicultural-bicultural rights were considered important. There were specific messages that people wanted to convey to those perceived as "like" themselves as well as to "others". After the May 2000 coup, however, the discourses change substantially. Indo-Fijians began to negotiate their identity in relation to indigenous Fijians and indigenous-settler narratives. What emerged from my questions about the past was a confused re-narrating of memory, experience and identity that was played out in the interstices of Australian-ness, Fijian-ness and Indian-ness, meshing, adapting and recreating these concepts.

27. Ganguly 1992, 29.

28. Ibid., 30.

29. Ibid., 30.

But in spite of the performative nature of their Indian identities, memories of Fiji were powerful—the plentifulness of the food in the small towns, the ease of daily life, the availability of domestic help. Abha, who came from a very poor family where she used to add to the family income by selling vegetables after school, spoke nostalgically of her idyllic childhood and mentioned in passing the many *roti* and *dalo* curries shared with her indigenous Fijian neighbors. When the first coup happened in 1987, she was visiting friends in New Zealand.

I believe had I been in Fiji there would have been pressure on me to choose sides [because she was a well-known businesswoman] whether that be with the coup instigators or the other people basically the rest of the Indian people. Now when I got back to Fiji, which was about two weeks after the coup, there was a certain undercurrent in the country and I knew one or two of the coup leaders. My immediate impression was that the Fiji that I had left would not come back. Two weeks ago it was a different Fiji and after the coup the situation was quite different.

When asked to elucidate the difference, she said:

It had changed in the sense that suddenly walking on the street you could feel a certain amount of aggression and pride coming from the Fijian people. They seemed a little bit bolder. The Fijian people are very meek and mild really when you come to consider that they have such good soldiers that warrior mentality only came out in them when they were at war but walking along the street previous to the coup they were very polite. They had just become a little bit more aggressive. At the time I was concerned I had to make a decision and the decision simply was this. If we decided to stay in Fiji, if we decided to remain here we would have to adapt to the new conditions because I knew that the old Fiji was gone, that there would be new conditions and if I wanted to remain with my family we would have to accept the new parameters that were going to be set. If I didn't want to accept those new parameters, then it would be better for me to leave. Did I feel personally insecure, no I did not. I guess this is because I had so many and I still had so many Fijian friends with whom I mixed that I could see where they were

coming from and just quietly I probably had a little bit of sympathy for the way they felt.

Abha and her family moved to Australia and, even though she misses the "idyllic life" in Fiji, she admitted that emigration had liberated her. She then mentioned the fact that her parents-in-law who had remained behind were now in a parlous state since their indigenous landowners had refused to renew their leases. Abha's musings revealed "a set of submerged meanings" where, according to Ganguly, "nostalgia becomes the symptomatic locus of repressed fantasies of identity and belongingness. Fragmented and marginalized narratives of past attachments reappear as wishful thinking, sentimentality and misremembering"³⁰ at the same time as the present brings on pragmatism. When I asked Abha whether she had problems traveling with her Fijian passport (as I had with my Indian one), proving her visa or citizenship status, presenting reasons for traveling whenever she crossed borders, she replied that she was determined to get a "black" (Australian) passport as soon as possible. She also said that she was resigned to the discrimination she experienced in Australia and overseas because of her race because the position of Indians had always been contingent. "I can cope with it. I grew up in Fiji, didn't I?" For her, thinking about the past was also a way of affirming how much better she was in the present.

Abha, like most Indo-Fijian families I worked with, while nostalgic about the past, found their present circumstances rewarding. Their reminiscences about their wonderful lives in Fiji were constantly undercut by the imperatives of migration. For example, Ravi, who was a journalist in Fiji before she moved to Sydney, says:

I think I was very well placed, where I was, I would really, even now, I would have done really well, in my profession and would have made good money. And I would have at least had a permanent job and everything else. I mean, like, I think I was very well placed in terms of living in the city (Suva). I had

my own house, and we had some of the basic luxuries and we have done a fair bit of traveling as well. I was very content and very happy, I couldn't ask for any more from life, you know, but ah, but we decided to move. We had achieved everything that we had set ourselves towards working, like, we had set goals and we had met all our goals, and we were very happy and content. But we decided to move.

When I asked why she had moved to Australia when she had been so successful in Fiji, the explicit reason she gave was the securing of her children's future; yet even this was fraught with uncertainty. The coups made her see herself as more Indian yet she was never sure whether her children would adopt this intensified Indian identity:

But when the coup happened, that is when I was taken aback and I was basically shocked and I said, "oh, because I am Indian this has happened and because my people are Indian this has happened. So how do I take myself from here? Now that this identity issue has become a crisis in my own life?" But I thought, like, oh no, I'll have to send my daughter to a school where she can learn the Indian way of life, the Indian culture, tradition and then the religion as well as learn the language. And um, perhaps the coup was one of the reasons I did that. I said "look, I can't let go of this identity". I felt that my Indian identity was being threatened. All this other time I was taking it for granted. Look, I have this identity and I am an Indian and it will continue without asking too many questions. But when the coup happened I realized all of a sudden, look I am Indian and I felt that my identity was being threatened.

Amina, who migrated to Sydney after the 2000 coup, said that one of the major reasons for her move was the issue of race:

Yes, I think the um, the effect, after the coup, race has become a major issue in this country. So we are like, we feel sort of, more Indian because really the Fijians are coming from the other side and we have been kind of ostracized by Fijian community. So then we have realized that race is a very big issue in the country now. We Indians are, well this is my view, we are treated, we are

30. Ibid., 31-4.

sort of treated as second-rate citizens. You have to walk a tight-rope. Not to be seen as anti-Fiji and pro-India or whatever. But I've got at the back of my mind that this country is now a racial, it's turned racial.

After the May 2000 coup, the discourses of belonging and remembering began to veer towards different referents; the same Indo-Fijians that I spoke to recalled being Fijian rather than Indian. They began to construct renovated and nostalgic relationships to their Fijian homeland. Some came out as having Fijian ancestry, which they admitted would once have been seen as a source of shame in the Indo-Fijian community, but was now looked on as a source of legitimation. Another iterated a list of her indigenous friends and said:

My husband was so touched, once when we went to a party – Indians and Fijians you know on a boat. When the time came to leave, the Fijians were still drinking *yagona*³¹ and the Indians were leaving. We got up to leave but one of our Fijian friends said, oh don't go now, let's wait for the *vulagi* to leave.

This speaker interpreted this statement as a crucial sign of inclusiveness because *vulagi* is the Fijian term for foreigner and is often used to denote pejoratively the Indo-Fijian community. Another woman emphasized that her grandfather, unlike the stories of other indentured labor, actually wanted to leave India because of colonial oppression:

When the ship sailed from Calcutta, he stood on the deck and said, good-bye my motherland, I hope never to see you again. In Fiji, he found the liberty to be himself.

A staunchly Hindu woman, whose husband was a member of the *Kisan Sangh* (the organization of sugar-cane farmers in Fiji), told me a story (probably apocryphal). An Indian holy man who was deported for or-

31. Alcoholic drink indigenous to Fiji.

ganizing strikes amongst the sugar-cane workers in Fiji in the 1920s had warned the Indian community: "What you lack is land and women. To fulfill both these lacks, you must marry the *Kaiviti* (indigenous Fijians)." It seemed that, for these Indo-Fijians, the May 2000 coups had finalized most poignantly their rupture with Fiji. They realized once and for all the impossibility of return and this closure, paradoxically, made it safe for a therapeutic retrieval of their Fijian identity.

Shared and Contested Spaces: Work and Marriage

Most of my interlocutors had been active in the workforce in Fiji. According to Jacqueline Leckie, women's labor was necessary for the food and service sectors especially during the initial stages of the globalization of Fiji's economy. Historically, British regulations had stipulated that forty percent of plantation labor be female. But when sugar production shifted to small family farms at the end of indenture in 1920, these were usually too small to support extended families. Consequently, men often worked in off-farm agricultural work while women and children provided the cheap labor essential for on-farm production. Recent structural adjustment programs also affected women's formal employment opportunities, which were mainly in the public, retailing, financial, manufacturing and tourism sectors since these were the first to be subject to downsizing and cost-cutting.³²

The gender stereotypes in the Indo-Fijian communities are also particularly conservative. Brij Lal, in his account of his time at the University of the South Pacific, recounts how young men in steady relationships would expect their girlfriends to take care of all their domestic chores. If some of these women rebelled, the men broke off the relationships, sometimes violently, leaving the girls in a terrible position because they were now damaged goods, *phuta pataka* or exploded firecrackers.³³ He

32. Leckie 2000, 178-201.

33. Lal 2001, 93.

recalls envying the indigenous students whose attitudes to relationships with the opposite sex were far more relaxed.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the identities of my interlocutors appeared fractured in the context of the disruptions of the past decade. Most of them found it challenging to function effectively in Australian society because the gender expectations of the two cultures were so different. Several said that their husbands had to be constantly reassured in their roles of protector of and provider for their families and this was particularly hard on their daughters. These recollections also disrupted the earlier narratives of "idyllic life" in Fiji. Women recalled being forced into arranged marriages, of not being allowed to attend university while brothers who had obtained worse marks at school did so. One woman recalled, with deeply felt resentment, that though her family depended on her income, she was still abused if she came home even five minutes late. Limits over women's occupational and spatial mobility were reinforced through personal ties of love and loyalty, fear of non-acceptance in the local community and bringing shame on the family.³⁴ Imrana Jalal and Wadan Narsey have labeled this a "culture of silence" that condemns women's assertiveness as disrespectful to those with traditional power.³⁵ Many women also commented that in post-coup Fiji, many Indo-Fijian families tightened controls on women's mobility for fear of ethnic violence.

It is in these contexts that "bureau marriages" were mentioned. Initially migration to the USA, Canada or Australia was through technical qualifications but now it is increasingly through marriage and family sponsorship. All my interlocutors mentioned the great demand for overseas resident Indo-Fijians as marriage partners. A significant minority of them migrated to Australia through arranged marriages with Indo-Fijian men resident in Australia. However, there were also arranged marriages to Europeans through commercial marriage bureaux or pen pal clubs. One of the women showed me an advertisement from the *The Fiji Times*:

34. See also Leckie 2000, 187.

35. Balance 1997, 8-9.

Canadian of European origin, single, medium height, 55 years, secure income, own property, marriage to Indian lady (slim, up to 40 years), sincere, friendly and willing to relocate. Please correspond with photograph.

There were also cases of marriages of convenience carried out to secure permanent residence in countries like Australia, New Zealand or Canada. All my interlocutors knew some cases and Amina described a particularly harrowing one:

This man, he divorced his wife in Fiji, and married someone in Australia—a marriage of convenience—he brought his children over with them and after a few years divorced this Australian woman. And the children grew up and when they were about 21 or so, they sponsored their mother to join them. And for like 10 or 15 years this husband was away from his wife and it's a torturing experience, I mean just imagine, all these years you are away from your wife, and you live with this other woman, and you are bound to get closer to her, get involved and get emotional.

On a research trip to Fiji, I had a particularly poignant interview with a young Indo-Fijian woman who was trying to migrate "anywhere" out of Fiji. Her situation was compounded by the fact that she was a single mother who had borne a daughter out of wedlock and thus had difficulty functioning in her own community.

I want to migrate, but it's just that I'm not qualified. Otherwise I would have left Fiji four years ago, five years ago. Because I don't have any technical qualifications. But if I could get a permanent residency I would be out of this country, tomorrow. Within weeks maybe. Just because, well, I have a daughter and I would like to send her to high school in Australia or New Zealand. I would do anything to be able to migrate.

This woman had considered bureau marriages and even contacted a few prospective "husbands" but could not bring herself to take the final step.

Brij Lal in the story "Kismet" recounts the experience of his protago-

nist Mumtaz who marries an Australian man "who sent her the sponsorship papers and a one-way ticket":

Mumtaz was nothing if not enterprising. She got her Australian passport at the earliest opportunity and ... sponsored her mother. Later other members of the family arrived through sham marriages to Mumtaz's Australian friends whose fares she paid to go to Fiji: they got their paid holiday, and her brothers got their visas.³⁶

While Indo-Fijians hardly ever marry indigenous Fijians or Indians of other religions, Europeans appear to be exempt from this cultural endogamy. The predicament of Indo-Fijians is now so intense that the undersupply of overseas resident Indo-Fijian marriage partners has made this type of relationship more common. My interlocutors all claimed to have heard of such marriages and many said they knew of at least one person who had come to Australia through a "bureau marriage". From discussions with these women, it appeared that the issue of marriage was secondary, even irrelevant, compared with the opportunities offered by migration: betterment of economic status and life chances. Marriages were their passports to better lives. But details of bureau marriages, especially to Europeans were less forthcoming, especially in regard to their success. However, the women all agreed that they would have undertaken almost any degree of hardship to escape Fiji after the 1987 coups since "there was no future for us there." One woman recalls that on a visit to Fiji after the 2000 coup, she was approached by numerous women for help in getting to Australia:

They are waiting for this Prince with a black (Australian) passport and even working women who've got really good jobs. One woman who used to work with me in the newspaper industry and she always was turning away all the local men, just because she wanted to move overseas. She has lost her parents and she is living with her brother and his family and she feels that she is like a burden on the family, although she is working. So she is just waiting.

36. Lal 2001b, 200.

When I was returning to Australia, she said, "make sure, don't forget, please arrange a boy for me from Australia." As if it's that easy.

Shared and contested narratives

Are there possibilities of common memories and shared narratives between the indigenous and Indo-Fijian communities? Or is Fiji an example of Lyotard's *differend*: discourses so mutually exclusive, because they begin from such radically different first positions that there can be no consensus.³⁷ Vijay Mishra has commented that there are very few theoretical studies of Fijian politics and culture or the creation of the Fijian nation-state that could open up the national repressed, or remind us of Walter Benjamin's observation in another context, that the documents of civilization are simultaneously documents of barbarism. Mishra asks whether it is possible to frame a moment (the coup of May 2000) that signifies a compulsion to return to some lost nirvanic past, when that moment is simultaneously one of redemption (for the Fijian) and betrayal (for the Indian).³⁸

According to Mishra, for the 60,000 indentured laborers who arrived from 1879 to 1917 land ownership was not a mystique but a commodity, a point of entry into the psyche of a feudal system from which, in India, they had been excluded³⁹ though members of the Indo-Fijian community have pointed out that emotional and spiritual bonds can co-exist with other ties. Indo-Fijian leaders such as A. D. Patel, from 1946 onwards, claimed a place in the nation on the basis of their labor and economic contribution.⁴⁰ The Indian indentured laborer's lament, according to poet Raymond C. Pillai, went thus:

We came in answer to your plea,
We came to build your land.

37. Lyotard 1988.

38. Mishra nd., 2 of 9.

39. Ibid.

40. Jolly 1992, 346.

But now that you are strong and free,
You turn our hopes to sand.⁴¹

Indian petitions to the Constitution Review Commission counteracted Fijian ethnocentrism with statements such as:

The Indians brought Fiji out of savagery to the present brilliant, progressive and prosperous status. Fijians want ready made money, ready made *kana* (food), ready made clothing and housing. Fairy tale life style won't work. One thing was good, that we Indo-Fijians were in Fiji, otherwise the Fijian population would have been only good enough to suit Museums and Zoos and the highland as happened in New Zealand, Australia and America with the natives.⁴²

During my stay in Fiji in September 1999, about eight months before the coup, I spoke to a number of sugar-cane farmers whose leases were about to expire. One old man said:

What the *Kaiviti* (indigenous Fijians) don't realize is that if we hadn't been used as cannon fodder on the sugar-cane plantations, they would have had to do it. They would have worked and died and their culture would have been destroyed. Why do they want to destroy us? You should have seen this land when our family got it. It was a jungle. We've made it beautiful, made it pay. It is our mother too.

Conclusion

In a 1997 article, Ian Boxill claims that Indo-Fijians, by virtue of their history, are more disposed to dealing with the world capitalist economy than Fijians, because many more Fijians than Indians live in isolated rural communal settings—on the periphery of the periphery. Despite its semi

feudal nature, indentureship carried with it aspects of capitalism, including waged labor, rational calculation and individualism.⁴³ Nii-K. Plange agrees that, under the colonial state "Fijian access to, and effective participation in, the newly introduced economy was discouraged."⁴⁴

The way in which the two communities construct their relationships to land, the "way of the land" opposed to the "way of money" also informs their conceptions of nation. Henry Rutz writes that since independence in 1970, leaders of both communities exhorted their constituencies to imagine a multi-racial and harmonious nation. Indians wanted to be newly created citizens with full political rights, including a one person/one vote system in a civil society that subordinated the status of religion, race and particularistic culture. In contrast, the Fijian rhetoric of accommodation presumed that the nation would be imagined as "mutual respect" between different racial communities, reinforced by a narrative of "multiracial" harmony and voting by racial communities for persons of the same race. As Rutz perceptively says, the coups of 1987 halted the experiment of transplanting an 18th century nation-state in the time-space of Fiji. It took away the *Other* against which the Fijian identity had been dialectically shaped by racial politics during the colonial and independence periods.⁴⁵ Henceforth, the contest over "the nation" would be de-centered, resurfacing within the Fijian community itself.

After the coup in May 2000, Teresia Teaiwa also commented that the problem with Fijian nationalism is that there is no Fijian nation. Fiji's problem, she said, was Fijian, not Indian. Teaiwa highlighted the fact that "part-Europeans" form the largest and most influential group of general voters and, in the post-coup era, they shifted from their historical identification with colonial European privilege towards a reclamation of their "part-Fijian" roots, reflecting a recognition of the contemporary realities of political power in Fiji: indigenous Fijians rule. George Speight's father, a "part-European" and former general elector named Sam Speight, became a "born-again Fijian" in the post-coup era. She continued, "George

41. Pillai 1979, 160.

42. Norton 2000, 110.

43. Boxill 1997, 2, 41.

44. Plange 1990, 21.

45. Rutz 1995.

Speight claims to represent indigenous Fijian interests. Sporting his European name, speaking exclusively in English, drawing on his Australian and American degrees in business for *mana*, and wearing his designer clothes, Speight does indeed represent indigenous Fijian interests. But Speight's indigenous Fijian interests are clearly neither the indigenous Fijian interests of Ratu Mara nor those of the late Dr. Bavadra."⁴⁶

One of the rhetorical strategies linking tradition to the nation, the strategy of the betrayal of the land, is discussed in Rutz's 1995 article. The leader of the Fijian Nationalist Party (formed in 1980), Sakeasi Butradoka, argued that independence for Fijians lay in the future, not the past because Fijians had to free themselves from the democracy which had linked their destiny to the Indians. Democracy and equality, he said, were western constructs which were major obstacles to the true independence of Fiji: "The Fijian Nationalist cannot accept the equality of all the races ... Equality of rights ... has to involve a recognized and accepted inequality of rights due to history".⁴⁷

In Butradoka's vision, the indigenous Fijian and the Indian Fijian could not both be equal citizens of some future Fijian nation. The propositions of both liberalism and Marxism that assume that one is born to certain particular identities and/or struggles to acquire general or universal identities of a class, of the citizen of a nation, or even of the human were anathema to him because they were incapable of describing the politics of identity in contemporary democracies. European political theory assumes that democracy is about development—of the individual into a citizen with legal and political rights, equal to all other citizens, of the nation into a secular set of communities living harmoniously with each other. In the last few decades, however, postcolonial democracy has also had to incorporate concepts of multiculturalism and diversity. In the politics of diversity, identities are not so much given and then transcended in the interest of an overarching unity; they are acquired and performed in contexts in which unities are seen as always contingent and shifting.⁴⁸ Indo-Fijian writer Subramani agrees:

46. Teaiwa 2000.

47. Premdas 1980, 36, cited in Rutz 1995.

48. Chakrabarty 2000.

... [W]e can move all move towards being Fijian, which ... is an identity that we have yet to imagine fully. ... The political logic of accepting difference is inventing and supporting institutions that help difference to be maintained. It is not necessary to create one people and one nation; rather, we should learn to view a system of difference as our unity.⁴⁹

Thus Butradoka was not saying that Indo-Fijians had to have unequal rights because they were racially inferior; indeed some Fijians claimed to need special treatment because in "civilization" the Indians have a thousand years start on them.⁵⁰ What he was saying was that the inequality was about entitlement and had to do with the necessity of history—the experiences of cession and indenture on Fijian land should ensure, rather than erase, Fijian paramountcy. In other words, Fiji could never be a democracy where Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians developed equally and together to become citizens with equal rights in a nation-state. Indians could never become Fijians nor was it possible for Fijian democracy to allow complete diversity.

The issues of land, nation and identity in Fiji are located fuzzily at the analytical intersection of mercantile forces, British imperialism, the experience of indenture and pre-colonial Fijian political cultures in transition. They cannot be approached as logical outcomes of European commercial penetration, colonization and assimilation but as historical processes involving complicated European, indigenous and indentured struggles for control over land and resources as well as power, privilege and authority in the aftermath of imperialism. In a sense, part of the problem is that both groups are employing different colonization/ conquest paradigms that are part of a zero sum game.

In Fiji, little attempt has been made to address the ever-shifting lines of alliance or confrontation within indigenous and indentured communities and cultures or to create convincing narratives of mutual substance, history or interdependence or to counter the feeling amongst a majority of Fijians that encouraging immigrant communities to retain, practice

49. Subramani 1995.

50. Norton 2000, 106.

and promote the culture of their homelands squeezes and diminishes the place of Fijian culture in the only possible homeland of Fijian culture. For indigenous Fijians, the crucial problem with the 1997 Constitution was that it failed to acknowledge the critical, symbolic, spiritual and practical reality that the Fijian archipelago was the only possible spot on the entire planet where Fijian aspirations of nationhood and cultural pride can be experienced and performed. Once eroded or lost, there was no motherland over the horizon to which pilgrimages could be made to seek rejuvenation or solace (in a clear reference to the Indo-Fijians heritage in India). As one indigenous Fijian said to me, "It is here or nowhere for everything that is Fijian".⁵¹

In an article on the Constitutional Review in Fiji, Robert Norton pointed out that the official submission from the governing party, *Sogosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT), was an exposition of the relationship between *taukei* (indigenous owner), normally at the forefront of decision-making and *vulagi* (guest or foreigner) who are allowed to participate but "they must not be domineering or forceful ... they need to be reminded time and again of this fact." This *taukei/vulagi* relationship challenges the universal human rights concepts in which all citizens of a nation are considered equal. The petition went on to say that "Indians have shown no signs of cultural assimilation or sensitivity."

Similarly, J. N. Kamikamica, a past general manager of the Native Land Trust Board, considers that one of Fiji's major challenges is to resolve the meaning of *taukei* and *vulagi* so that it accords with the changing nature of Fijian society. He points out that the protection of indigenous ownership of the bulk of land resources and the preservation of their culture and traditions in rural Fiji shields indigenous Fijians from the competitive world of twentieth-century Fiji. But since Fiji citizenship does not bestow the same rights and privileges on the other communities, when and how, Kamikamica asks, may a non-Fijian aspire to and acquire a position similar to that of a *taukei*?⁵²

51. These sentiments were expressed in a number of emails and conversations with indigenous Fijians over the latter half of 2000.

52. Kamikamica 1997, 259, 289.

For some indigenous Fijians, the only way of promoting a sense of a common cultural identity and a shared national purpose is to allow only Fijian nationalism and Fijian national identity. For them, since independence, and indeed during the country's colonial period, the promotion of a collective national identity was discouraged as it was not clear how the Indians would be able to fit in. The result, they claim, has been an unhealthy preoccupation with provincial and ethnic rather than national interests. For them, the new Fiji—its language, symbols, institutions, anthems, history, mythology—must be unequivocally and unmistakably Fijian. Immigrant communities will have no choice other than to embrace this reality and "once this reality has been accepted into the marrow of all they will finally have earned the right to be called Fijians."⁵³ It is interesting that this rhetoric reflects in part the sentiments expressed by fundamentalist Hindu parties in India, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party; for example their insistence that Muslims and Christians must all become Hindus first, calling themselves "Muslim Hindus" and "Christian Hindus".

In an interview with Vilsoni Hereniko, just before the May 2000 coup, the Indo-Fijian writer Subramani spoke of his vision for Fiji:

I would like to see a seamless flow of languages. That would be very interesting, something unique. It would make Pacific literature different. In the same way, I think cultures could also flow like that. Then we would have a lot of integration happening and new cultural forms emerging ... If you go to some of our schools now, it's already happening. In the playground students switch from one language to another. They speak a pidgin variety of English that freely incorporates Fijian and Hindi. But it's not reinforced in the classroom, where English is still the dominant language ... The multilingual medium could have a great impact. I think we'll have a situation in which there's great audience participation. At the moment when you watch television, Hindi, Fijian, and English programs appear separately. There will be a time in the future when programs will not be divided that way; instead there will be a spontaneous flow of multilingual programs.⁵⁴

53. Letter cited in footnote 21. Also interviews with interlocutors Suva S2, T3 and Nadi P4 and L7.

54. Hereniko 2001, 184.

The archives also have similar stories. They tell us, for example, that when the coolie ship *Syria* was wrecked in 1894, some Fijians looted the ship but many others swam out to save the shipwrecked. They also make clear that in spite of British laws proscribing such activities, Fijian villages in the nineteenth century sheltered Indian laborers who fled the plantations. The autobiography of Totaram Sanadhya tells us that there were also some indigenous Fijians who worked in the sugar plantations in spite of Arthur Gordon. When, starving and unable to bear the horrible conditions of plantation life in Fiji, Sanadhya was about to hang himself, some indigenous Fijians who had previously lived in his coolie line not only prevented him from doing so but also brought him food from their villages.⁵⁵

In the article cited above, Vijay Mishra comments that the present political predicament in Fiji happened partially because the drive for independence was fuelled primarily by Indian desire for change. The Fijian upper classes, protected by the patronage of the Great Council of Chiefs, had no interest in an anti-colonial struggle against the British and only came into the picture after the Indian indentured laborers began the struggle. In the process, says Mishra, the *girmityas* or indentured Indians were gradually reconstructed as symbolic colonizers wishing to alienate the Fijians from their land while the patrician Fijians were cast as defenders of the charter of the land. The native Fijian, denied the nationalist legacy of anti-colonialism used the rapidly globalizing discourse of land rights as a means of starting a new foundational narrative of the nation-state on the basis of a newly constructed anti-colonial struggle.⁵⁶ For many indigenous Fijians, the Indo-Fijians are another migrant race who want "to step into colonial shoes to control indigenous Fijian development."⁵⁷

The predicament of Fiji is crucial for postcolonial studies because it foregrounds one of the paradoxes of the post Cold War era and failed Third Worldism. Late decolonization of Fiji meant that the government of the newly independent country was not exposed to the discourses of Third World solidarity that emerged from the Bandung era; however, Fiji-

55. Sanadhya 1994.

56. Mishra nd., 5-6 of 9.

57. Samisoni 2001, 44.

ans were able to tap into the resurgent movements supporting indigenous rights in the 1970s and 1980s. Benjamin Barber in his book *Jihad vs McWorld* contrasts the way in which global economics appear to be increasingly enmeshed, uniting the world via various international treaties and instruments with the increasing political strife in many parts of the world that appear to divide it irrevocably.⁵⁸ In a post-imperial era overseen by international bodies such as the United Nations, the nation-state was the model imposed by departing imperial powers on their erstwhile colonies. As the Fiji Constitution Review Commission of 1996 found in its drafting of a new constitution, universal covenants and declarations, often aimed at empowering people in the "Third World" (such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* and those on the *Rights of Indigenous People*) were not appropriate to a state where the indigenous people consisted of half the population, controlled the majority of the land and were the politically dominant group. According to Kaplan and Kelly:

Unambiguously, Fiji had to be a nation-state. But how the nation-state form, especially in its entitlements, was expected to fit Fiji's situation was utterly ambiguous.⁵⁹

Creating shared narratives that enable communities to co-exist harmoniously demands innovative solutions that may have to extend beyond the western model of democracy or the indigenous model of Fijian paramountcy. The major problem with Joseph Carens' proposition of "minimal moral standards" is that it privileges the notion of Fijian paramountcy in a way which precludes such possibilities as does Salman Rushdie's argument in favor of Indo-Fijians:

[m]igrant peoples do not remain visitors forever. In the end, their new land owns them as once their old land did, and they have a right to own it in their turn.⁶⁰

58. Barber 2001.

59. Kaplan and Kelly 2001, 177.

60. Age 2000.

Stephanie Lawson cautions that the hijacking of the moral discourse of indigenous rights by Fijian nationalist claims serves to encourage the notion that indigenous rights must always take precedence over other claims to justice.⁶¹ How do we conceive of "nativeness" in less absolute terms, constructing articulated, rooted, and cosmopolitan practices that register more complex, emergent possibilities? How do we expand of our idea of what may be regarded as a "historical fact" and give credence to "experience" and its "truths" that may not always be verifiable by the historian's methods? Perhaps the most effective way to demonstrate that these other claims are not necessarily incompatible with indigenous rights is to approach Fijian history through the lens of colonialism. If, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words both Fijian and Indian cultures, knowledge, life-worlds and life-practices were invaded and colonized; if they both experienced what Gayatri Spivak called "epistemic violence", then this shared predicament of the Indian indentured immigrant and the indigenous Fijian landowner should create the possibility of a dialogue between the two. This conversation is not based only on "shared histories" (as may be claimed between the Settler and Native) but on the shared predicament of having been colonized (both politically and intellectually).⁶² For, as James Clifford argues, "an absolutist indigenism, where each distinct "people" strives to occupy an original bit of ground, is a frightening utopia. For it imagines relocation and ethnic cleansing on an unimaginable scale: a denial of all the deep histories of movement, urbanization, habitation, reindigenization, sinking roots, moving on, invading, mixing—the very stuff of human history."⁶³

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61. Lawson 2002.
 62. Chakrabarty 2000.
 63. Clifford 2001, 468.

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